

THE FOUNDING OF MCC IN AUSTRALIA MCC SYDNEY, ITS FIRST TEN YEARS

by Bruce Piper, 1986
revised by Willem Hein, 1993

Thursday, July 11, 1974 saw the arrival of Reverend Elder Troy D. Perry, Reverend Lee Carlton and two traveling companions—Randy (the lover of Rev. Carlton) and 'Graeme' from C.A.M.P. (Campaign Against Moral Persecution). The party was welcomed in Sydney by members and friends of 'Acceptance,' the Catholic homosexual group under the leadership of their National Convenor, Gary Pye. Rev. Perry attended a taping of a T.V. interview programme 'A Current Affair' at Channel 9. A welcome dinner and presentation for our guests was attended by some 36 people. Friday, July 12, saw more television interviews and a party held by members and friends of 'Acceptance' at Balmain gave those present an opportunity to get acquainted.

Sunday, July 14 at 7 p.m. Rev. Troy Perry and Rev. Lee Carlton were guest speakers at the worship service at the Wayside Chapel (formerly a Methodist church), at Kings Cross with the Chapel's pastor, Rev. Ted Noffs. The service was followed by 'Question Time' at which they were featured speakers. The hall was packed to overflowing.

Monday, July 15 at 7 p.m. Revs. Perry and Carlton held the first ever MCC worship service in Sydney at the home of Graeme Dinkin, 5 Scahill Street, Campsie. During the service Rev. Perry asked those who would like to see an MCC established in Sydney to raise their hands. This brought response from 18 people who were to form the nucleus of the first MCC Study Group in Australia.

On Sunday, August 25 at 8:30 p.m. the first service of the Study Group was held and consisted of prayers and communion conducted by Ray Griffin. Twenty five people in attendance and 24 received communion. The offering was \$29.50. Until the arrival of our first pastor, almost every member of the Study Group conducted or assisted in conducting the services. This gave us quite a range in the type of services; some excellent and others made us wonder how were were going to stay together! We made it through with the workings of the Holy Spirit.

On March 30, 1975 at 8 p.m. the Rev. Lee Carlton was welcomed as the Co-ordinator of Church Extension and he agreed to serve as the Pastor of Sydney MCC Study Group. This historic service was held at the Quaker Hall, Surry Hills with an attendance of 30 and an offering of \$47.40. April 20, 1975 at 7 p.m. our guest speaker was Rev. Larry Uhrig from MCC Honolulu, the attendance for this service jumped to a record 53 and the offering was \$114.96.

One person who was very special to our congregation and a good friend to our Pastor was Rev. Clyde Dominish of the Chapel by the Sea at Bondi Beach. Rev. Dominish took MCC services on a number of occasions. Another very special guest and friend was



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Rev. Russell Davies of the Methodist Church, Paddington. Without Russell's efforts on our behalf, MCC would not have shared facilities at the Village Church, Paddington, for our worship services.

The most important event in our short history was the chartering of our church which took place on July 6, 1975 at 3 p.m. in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Meeting House in Devonshire Street Surry Hills. Our attendance was 113 and the offering \$452.55.

The next memorable experience was the first Australasian District Conference which was hosted in Sydney from January 1-4, 1976. Among the clergy present were Revs. Lee Carlton, Troy Perry, Art Cazeault, Jan Weymouth, Peter Alexander-Smith (an Anglican priest who later joined MCC), and Don Mense (a Presbyterian minister from Auckland, N.Z.).

The service of July 25, 1976 Rev. Peter Alexander-Smith was introduced as the Assistant Pastor of the Sydney church, a position he held until his departure to take up the pulpit of the MCC Study Group in Auckland, New Zealand. His final service at Sydney was January 30, 1977.

October 3, 1976 saw the beginning of the second MCC church in Sydney known as MCC North Shore. The group met in the Friendly's Hall at North Sydney and performed a ministry there until May 15, 1977 when Cliff Connors preached the final service, with Rev. Ron Burcham in the congregation saying that the 'purpose for the existence of the Study Group was now fulfilled.'

On February 6, 1977 exhorter Cliff Connors, who was originally from Brisbane, Queensland, took over the pulpit until the arrival of Rev. Ronald Burcham, who was installed as MCC Sydney's Pastor on Sunday, March 13, 1977. The installation was carried out by the District Coordinator, Rev. Jan Weymouth and Rev. Stan Harris and exhorter Cliff Connors. Approximately 6 months later Rev. Burcham resigned as pastor and returned to the US. The services were conducted by Rev. Jan Weymouth who had been asked by the Board of Directors to assist us until the appointment of a new pastor. She was assisted by Cliff Connors and other members of the pastoral staff.

About September of 1977 we were delighted to learn that the Ministerial Affairs and Credentials Committee (later to be known as C.C.C.C.) had licensed Cliff Connors as clergy. On December 13, 1977 Rev. Cliff Connors was installed as the 3rd pastor of MCC Sydney. Due to the onset of Hodgkins Disease, a cancer of the lymph system, Cliff resigned from the ministry and from the pastorate of the Sydney church on March 16, 1978. Rev. Connors returned to the UFMCC clergy, in 1985 after extensive treatment.

The Board was formed into a pulpit committee with Don Rankin as interim Worship Coordinator. On May 20, 1979 a ballot was held at the conclusion of the Sunday evening worship to elect a new pastor. The successful candidate, Rev. Donald El Johnson (D.J.) began his ministry on August 26, 1979. D.J. was with us for 3 years and resigned on January 2, 1983 due to ill health.

Barry Heller, long time supporter of the Sydney church and former Clerk, served as Worship Coordinator until the arrival of Rev. Jim N. Dykes who was inducted on April 24, 1983 as Sydney's fifth Pastor and District Coordinator for North Australia. Jim's ministry saw the start of many community based AIDS projects including The Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, the Community Support Network (or AIDS Maids), the Ankali Project (based on the Sahnti Project of San Francisco). Rev. Dykes retired as pastor and UFMCC clergy in 1988 for health reasons, but continues to work in many community areas dealing with AIDS.

Looking For An Australian Church

by The Rev. Willem Hein

(written as part of a newsletter within the District of Australia)

Earlier this year I attended the worship service of MCC Sydney, where the above title hit my eyes; it was part of a series that was being presented in worship. Since that time, on several occasions the same thought has been presented, and I am glad that it has taken the phrase listed - "*Looking for an Australian Church*", for truly we are all looking.

I have had to question just what an Australian church is, especially in the light of my experiences here and overseas, and I continue to ask the question, "Just what is an Australian church?" If one looked purely within the UFMCC here, one would have to be ruthlessly honest. Our church (and these are my experiences) grew out of an American style of worship and structure that had a heavy emphasis on the Pentecostal tradition. Since that time, through a variety of administrations, we have had everything from Liberal Catholic through Salvation Army, to Uniting Church and even Public Service influence.

Our worship varies from church to church, and although basically our belief systems vary as well, our expression of them varies only minimally. Thus as we continue our journey to what I believe will one day be a national church in fellowship with other national MCC's, I also continue to ask the question, "Well, just what is an Australian church?"

One could look at all the obvious things, such as the context of Australian social justice, our own peculiar social and religious problems, land rights, racism and exploitation, for all of these carry a unique brand of Australianism. Yet when we get to basics, what is it that forms the MCC's in Australia as a peculiarly Australian church body? If I spoke from my own experiences, then I would have to at times include such matters as apathy, non-communication, and parochialism as traits that may set our MCC's apart from those in other countries. However, I know from my overseas experience that these are not unique to MCC's in Australia, nor are these traits unique to Australian society.

If I look at worship, what is it that would set the Australian churches (and not just MCC's) apart from the rest of the world? Is it the uniqueness found in liturgy, with a rediscovery of Aboriginal spirituality? Is it the way we structure our prayers? If I look at administration, is it the way we are discovering an independence that makes us ask what it is that keeps us together? Are there peculiarly Australian virtues, such as love, trust, and working together, or are there ways in which to "Australianize" them?

Historically, it has only been in recent years that we have faced this question. All Christian groupings were not so much concerned with the "Australian" aspect of the church as with the Christianization (and by inference, Europeanization) of the community. While some nuns, priests, and clergy, and indeed more recently laity, showed a fierce independence, this was often still within the constraints of a European (and Catholic or Protestant) ideology.

Perhaps in the next years, as we search for what is an Australian church, all of us will, at local, district, and national levels, have to participate in the dialogue and change process that will truly begin to develop a Christian church that is uniquely Australian.

